

Working with the Media

A Quick-Reference Guide



Provided by:
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Fort Bragg, NC 28307

1. Leaders who won't speak with the media give the impression they're withholding information. Within established guidelines, it's our responsibility to talk to the media, and subsequently the public. Talk to the media if your mission permits, but don't use "too busy" as a smoke screen to avoid contact.
2. You can talk to unescorted media. During early phases of an operation, media are likely to be uncredentialed and unescorted.
3. If a reporter wants information you can't release, don't evade and don't say, "No comment." Don't use security classification as an excuse no to talk about negative or embarrassing events. If you can't give certain information, explain why. If it's classified, it's classified. If you don't know, say you don't know. Questions on specific operational capabilities can sometimes be best answered using terms such as "approximate," "light," "moderate" or "heavy." Everyone has the responsibility to safeguard classified information, but don't confiscate material or equipment, and don't detain the media.
4. Make a friend of the reporter. Remember that the reporter is only a conduit through which you can get your message to possibly millions of people.
5. Reporters' questions are your opportunity to educate. Formulate your answer before speaking. You don't have to answer questions immediately. If an interview is taped and you stumble, ask if you can start over.
6. Make your answer relevant to the question. Don't try to dazzle a reporter with fancy footwork; but have one or two major ideas or facts you want to get across, and get them in

at the earliest opportunity.

7. Be honest and as straightforward as possible. Look at each question from the public's point of view -- and relate your answers to the public.
8. Interviewers like colorful language and clear examples -- but keep it simple and conversational. Avoid abbreviations, acronyms and initials.
9. If a reporter interrupts before you finish your response -- pause, let the reporter finish, then continue your answer. Be professional even when the media seem aggressive or questions seem silly. Don't be badgered or harrassed. On the other hand, if a reporter consistently interrupts, there may be a reason. Don't over-talk, and don't run off with the interview.
10. If a reporter asks several questions at once, you might reply; "You've asked several questions there. Let me respond to your main point first..."
11. Always try to be friendly -- and smile when appropriate. Remember you're talking to a lot of people, and you want them on your side.
12. Don't let a reporter put words in your mouth. Don't repeat a reporter's "buzz words" unless you can do it to your advantage.
13. If a reporter asks a question "off the record," remember that anything you say can be used -- and probably will be.
14. Don't feel obligated to accept the reporter's facts and figures. Don't answer hypothetical questions.
15. Don't be afraid to ask a reporter to repeat a question.
16. Relax and enjoy yourself. It's really not that hard.

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